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Entomology Insect Information Series

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Stink Bugs on Tobacco

Adult stink bugs are large, shield shaped, brown or green bugs. They are approximately 5/8 inch long. Nymphs are similar to adults, but lack wings. Eggs are pinkish, barrel shaped, and are laid in clusters on the underside of leaves of the host plant. Stink bugs have piercing-sucking mouth parts. They can emit a very disagreeable odor.

A southern green stink bug on soybean (left) and a stink bug on a tobacco leaf (right).
Photos: Left, Clemson University CE Series 56-497; Right, D. G. Manley

Stink bugs are found on many vegetable and field crops, including tobacco. Adults are active fliers and readily move from one host to another. Their host range includes cucurbits, cole crops, legumes (beans, etc.), potatoes, sweet potatoes, tomatoes, eggplant, peppers, okra, and corn, as well as tobacco. Stink bugs possibly prefer snap or lima beans, or tomatoes, over any other cultivated crop.

Stink bugs attack all parts of a plant, but they particularly prefer young, tender growth. On tobacco, they frequently attack the terminal growth area, or bud. Top leaves may wilt. (There are several other things that may cause terminal leaves to wilt in addition to stink bugs.)

Stink bugs overwinter in the adult stage, usually in well drained, sunny locations. During the spring and early summer, they occur on wild hosts as well as early vegetable crops. Later populations cause most of the damage, when adults and nymphs feed extensively. Populations reach their highest levels during September and early October, long after tobacco is out of the fields. Overwintered adults usually begin laying eggs in April. There are from two to four generations per year, with each generation lasting approximately 35 to 38 days.

Stink bug damage to tobacco.
Photo: D. G. Manley

Sanitation may be an important cultural control method for stink bugs. Clean up weeds from around fields. Stink bugs are difficult to control with chemicals, although there are some insecticides that are effective. Since the list of labeled products is constantly changing, and since available products varies from state to state, there will be no mention of specific products. With all insecticides, read and follow label instructions carefully.

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